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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

30 August 1985

Ethiopia's Policy Toward Its Famine Threatened People

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Summary

The primary goal of the Ethiopian government in Eritrea and Tigray Provinces, in our judgment, is to defeat the long-standing insurgent movements. Consequently, we believe that military operations, the government's famine relief programs, and the resettlement program are all subordinated to this prime objective, often to the detriment of the famine-threatened population. Western efforts to expand feeding programs into rebel held areas of the north are viewed with considerable suspicion by Addis Ababa, which believes that the West is using relief operations as a cover to aid the guerrilla forces.

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State Dept. review completed

This memorandum was requested by Phillip Ringdahl, Director, African Affairs, National Security Council. The paper was written by [redacted], East Branch, Africa Division of the Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It has been coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Africa Division, ALA [redacted]

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Government Policy

The Ethiopian government has tried to feed the population in areas of Eritrea and Tigray provinces that it controls, but makes little effort to assist relief operations outside government controlled areas--in effect offering people at risk the option of eating at government camps or starving. The Ethiopian government and international relief agencies are feeding approximately 60 percent of the 7.7 million people at risk countrywide. In northern Ethiopia, Addis Ababa provides for 955,000 people, while international agencies feed approximately 1.7 million persons. []

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Government relief programs, in our view, play an important role in Addis Ababa's campaign against the northern insurgencies. The northern camps have brought large numbers of the peasantry--many of whom oppose the regime--under government control. Party cadre attempt to indoctrinate the peasants and the facilities also are used to recruit people, sometimes forcibly, for the resettlement program that has moved some 500,000 people from the north since late 1984. []

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At the same time, the Ethiopian government has attempted to separate the rebels from the local population. Addis Ababa's military campaign in Tigray Province earlier this year was intended, in part, to bring more of the population under its control and to disrupt insurgent relief operations. On at least two occasions, Ethiopian aircraft attacked Tigrean relief convoys operating near the war zone, jeopardizing both international relief workers and refugees. The regime probably calculated that the offensive would force the population, denied assistance elsewhere, to flock to government relief facilities. []

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The Mengistu government also objects to crossborder feeding operations from Sudan or expanded northern feeding programs from government controlled areas of Ethiopia into rebel held regions. The regime believes that acceptance of these programs would grant legitimacy to the insurgents and strengthen their hold on the rural population. International pressure has forced the regime to agree to a limited expansion of relief operations in Eritrea and Tigray, but Addis Ababa has ensured that it will be conducted from government held towns and tightly controlled by the regime. []

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Efforts to expand relief operations into rebel held areas also are hindered by the deeply held belief of Mengistu and most other senior Ethiopian officials that Western efforts primarily are designed to undermine the central government. []

Ethiopian leaders have received numerous reports that Western aid is a cover for channeling military assistance to the insurgents and that many Western relief workers are intelligence agents. These concerns have resulted in directives to close northern feeding centers, such as Ibnet,

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as soon as possible in an effort to reduce the foreign presence in Ethiopia. Addis Ababa's suspicions have some basis in fact. According to US Embassy sources, the insurgents are using refugee camps in Sudan for recruitment and some relief assistance goes to insurgent troops. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

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Addis Ababa's military operations and carefully structured relief and resettlement programs will remain key weapons in its effort to undercut the northern rebellions, often to the detriment of its famine-threatened population. The Mengistu regime will continue to make minor concessions to the donor countries to preclude a cessation of Western relief assistance, but humanitarian concerns will continue, in our judgment, to take a back seat to its military struggle with the insurgents. [REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: Ethiopia's Policy Toward Its Famine-Threatened People []

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